

# The History of U.S. American Cinema from the Beginnings until Today



**Lecturer:** PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

**Course type:** Vorlesung, 2 or 3 CP

**Room and time:** GABF/613 (Süd), Wednesdays, 14-16

**Short description:** One of the reasons for the unprecedented success of U.S. popular culture can be found in the lasting attraction of Hollywood cinema. This lecture series will deal with the fascination that the dream factory has exerted upon mass audiences from the beginnings of modern entertainment culture. Our examples will include early short films, silent films as well as genre movies, *film noir*, monumental film, science fiction, and contemporary blockbusters. Special emphasis will be placed on film interpretation, the genealogy of cinematic techniques, and the emergence of the classical Hollywood system. While discussing these films on an aesthetic level (examining their strategies of narration and cinematic construction), we will also attempt to situate them within the framework of political and historical events. Themes to be discussed include race, gender, sexuality, class, and (hyper)reality.

**Course requirements:** In order to receive a 'Schein' for this course, you have to participate regularly, have watched the *main films* (check them out for 1 day at the 'Mediathek') and pass the final exam in class ('Abschlussklausur').

## Syllabus:

### 21. Oct. U.S. American Cinema – An Introduction

### 28. Oct. National Epics

Main film (required):

*The Birth of a Nation* (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915)

Alternative films:

*Gone with the Wind* (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939)

*The Grapes of Wrath* (dir. John Ford, 1940)

*Once upon a Time in America* (dir. Sergio Leone, 1984)

### 04. Nov. Slapstick and Screwball Comedy

Main film (required):

*Bringing up Baby* (dir. Howard Hawks, 1938)

Alternative films:

*The General* (dir. Buster Keaton, 1926)

*Modern Times* (dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1936)

*Some Like It Hot* (dir. Billy Wilder, 1959)

### 11. Nov. Art Films & Independent Cinema

Main film (required):

*Citizen Kane* (dir. Orson Welles, 1940)

Alternative films:

*Meshes of the Afternoon* (dir. Maya Deren & A. Hackenschmied, 1940)

*A Woman under the Influence* (dir. John Cassavetes, 1974)

*Reservoir Dogs* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1992)

### 18. Nov. Film Noir

Main film (required):

*Double Indemnity* (dir. Billy Wilder, 1944)

Alternative films:

*Laura* (dir. Otto Preminger, 1944)

*Gilda* (dir. Charles Vidor, 1946)

*Kiss Me Deadly* (dir. Robert Aldrich, 1955)

### 25. Nov. The Musical

Main film (required):

*Singin' in the Rain* (dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952)



Alternative films:

*Top Hat* (dir. Mark Sandrich, 1935)  
*The Wizard of Oz* (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939)  
*The Sound of Music* (dir. Robert Wise, 1965)

**02. Dec. The Western**

Main film (required):

*The Searchers* (dir. John Ford, 1956)

Alternative films:

*The Great Train Robbery* (dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1903)  
*Red River* (dir. Howard Hawks)  
*High Noon* (dir. Fred Zinnemann, 1950)

**09. Dec. Science Fiction**

Main film (required):

*War of the Worlds* (dir. Byron Haskin, 1953)

Alternative films:

*The Day the Earth Stood Still* (dir. Robert Wise, 1951)  
*Star Wars* (dir. George Lucas, 1977)  
*Independence Day* (dir. Roland Emmerich, 1996)

**16. Dec. Thrillers and Horror Films**

Main film (required):

*Psycho* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

Alternative films:

*Freaks* (dir. Tod Browning, 1932)  
*Carrie* (dir. Brian de Palma, 1976)  
*Wrong Turn* (dir. Rob Schmidt, 2003)

**23. Dec. War Movies**

Main film (required):

*Full Metal Jacket* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1986)

Alternative films:

*The Deer Hunter* (dir. Michael Cimino, 1978)  
*Saving Private Ryan* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1998)  
*The Thin Red Line* (dir. Terence Malick, 1998)

**13. Jan. Action Films**

Main film (required):

*Falling Down* (dir. Joel Schumacher, 1993)

Alternative films:

*Die Hard* (dir. John McTiernan, 1988)  
*Speed* (dir. Jan de Bont, 1994)  
*Enemy of the State* (dir. Tony Scott, 1998)

**20. Jan. Animation Movies**

Main film (required):

*Finding Nemo* (dir. Andrew Stanton & Lee Unkrich, 2003)

Alternative films:

*Fantasia* (prod. Walt Disney, 1940)  
*Toy Story* (dir. John Lasseter, 1995)  
*Shrek* (dir. Andrew Adamson, 2001)

**27. Jan. Final Exam**

**03. Feb. Wrap-up & Recent Developments**

*For films, please go to the 'Mediathek', GB 03/33 (Nord). The 'Mediathek' is open Tue, 11-14, Wed, 12-16, Thur, 12-16. Important note: Films can be checked out only over night (!) or over the weekend. Make sure you return the film the next possible weekday at 12!*

*All texts are available online at Blackboard! Make sure you have registered at Blackboard to download these materials.*